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SIPDIS
STATE FOR AF/E, AF/RSA AND A/S CARSON

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TAGS: PREL PGOV SO PHUM KDEM PINR

SUBJECT: Somalia - Puntland President Media Crackdown Fueling Political Discontent

REF: NAIROBI 2503; NAIROBI 2553; NAIROBI 2503

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Patterson, Counselor for Somalia Affairs, State Department, Somalia Unit; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Puntland President "Farole" appears to be holding VOA journalist Isaq, arrested on December 21 (reflets), on trumped up charges that Isaq was connected to last month's attacks in Puntland. Multiple Puntland contacts tell us they think "Farole" does not have credible evidence on which to hold Isaq and that the journalist is being held for political reasons. Numerous Puntland contacts tell us there are processes underway inside the Puntland administration and within the clans to mitigate "Farole's" influence. (Note: "Farole's" autocratic behavior over recent months has created backlash amongst political heavyweights in the semi-autonomous region and opportunities for al-Shabaab to play on growing political discontent. End note.) The Ambassador in late December sent "Farole" a letter demanding Isaq's immediate release. Post remains engaged with a variety of official contacts in Puntland, urging them to release Isaq and allow him to continue his work as a journalist (reflets). In addition, we are encouraging respected and credible members of the Puntland administration and Puntland civil society to continue their efforts to contain "Farole's" destructive behavior. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Our contacts tell us they think Isaq is being held by the President because his recent reports were not politically convenient for "Farole" and his son. (Note: "Farole's" son was recently appointed Media Advisor to the President and reportedly exercises increasingly unchecked authority under the protection of his father. End note.) Multiple contacts in Puntland tell us that Isaq was reporting against "Farole's" policy to push out south-central Somalis from the Puntland side of Galcaio town.

¶3. (C) Numerous Puntland contacts tell us processes are underway inside the Puntland administration and within the clans to mitigate "Farole's" influence (reflets). (Note: "Farole's" autocratic behavior over recent months has created backlash amongst political heavyweights in the semi-autonomous region and opportunities for al-Shabaab to play on growing political discontent. End note.) The Deputy Information Minister, widely respected across Puntland, who is the owner of a Puntland newspaper, is reportedly speaking out against "Farole's" treatment of the media and has participated with other ministers and clan leaders, to include the Ministers of Gender, Health, and Security in recent meetings focused on how to rein in "Farole's" destructive behavior.

¶4. (C) Comment: The Ambassador in late December sent "Farooole" a letter demanding Isaq's immediate release. Post remains engaged with a variety of official contacts in Puntland, urging them to release Isaq and allow him to continue his work as a journalist (reflets). In addition, we are encouraging respected and credible members of the Puntland administration and Puntland civil society to continue their efforts to contain "Farooole".

RANNEBERGER